



Nadine Gordimer's "The Pickup": A Wide Canvas of Socio-Economic Realism

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Abstract— *The Pickup* is a tale of romance, adventure and above all love of Julie for Abdu as she proves that her love does not change with changing situations. In spite of being the daughter of rich parents she decides to join Abdu and picks up her suitcase to live in a deserted Muslim village for the sake of love. In this novel the artist confirms that her range is pretty wide. In the beginning young guys take life non-seriously and lead life of Hippies. But Abdu has to pick up his suitcase as he can't live in Johannesburg due to lack of permission from Home Affairs department. Julie adjusts in the ordinary house of Abdu in a village of Arabian country. She does not join him to go to Chicago as he has no settled work and home there. She has of course identified herself with the village and the family of Abdu. Many matters of world economic business world are referred here and hence the novel is remarkable for socio-economic and ethical realism.

Keywords— *Corporate Houses, Economic Magnets, Socio-economic realism, Consumer Identified Self-willed, Patriarchy.*

INTRODUCTION

Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* (2001) is a thought-provoking novel though due emphasis has been attached to romance between Julie Summers and Abdu. Here she blames the various governments who strictly follow strict visa rules for immigrants as it is a question of purity of their racial blood. The reader is supposed to know the working of national economy to follow the eco-political developments in Johannesburg as pointed out in this novel. In a party at Nigel Ackroyd Summers' mansion a few capitalists have assembled for fun sake on Sunday and discuss various important issues such as — What is the situation of South African economy at present? Is it profitable to import many particular goods from Asian countries? Are the prices of Real Estate going up in the market? Which company's shares are shooting up now? What about the rise and fall of G.D.P. in South Africa? Who can be regarded the richest man of the country at

present? What are the goods manufactured in South Africa? Will South Africa become an economic power in near future? Is it at all profitable to invest money in gold at present? What is the economic policy of the government for the promotion of Corporate Houses? Are taxes going to be cut down for the rich merchants in near future? What is the position of liquid money at present? Is there bright future of big manufacturing units in South Africa? How will national politics effect the economic growth of the nation? etc. Here the author probes into global economic issues and novel is remarkable for economic realism.

But then Julie and her lover Abdu fail to understand all such discussions in the party as Julie has come to meet her worthy father who has taken divorce from her mother. He just says 'Hello' to her and becomes busy in conversation with his royal guests. Both the lovers feel disappointed and ignored here as parents have no time for children and never try to share their joys and sorrows in

this age of complexities and illusions. Julie's mother also remarried another fellow after divorce and she too is ignorant about the daily life of daughter Julie.

In spite of all rejection and dejection Julie knows how to enjoy life in Johannesburg and have fun in the restaurant El-Ay. Her friends fail to follow any ethical code of conduct and just survive in the present — 'Eat, drink and be merry and tomorrow we shall die.' Such Hippies and ignorant young men and girls could be seen in American, British and other advanced countries those days and their life-style ignored the question of difference between right and wrong. Whatever satisfied and appealed them in the present, was a friend as they didn't bother to know what is friendship. Since their parents were busy in materialistic life, these young guys enjoyed hard drinks, parties, cockine, drugs and didn't mind having sex before marriage. Nobody analyzed the sancity of marriage tradition.

El-Ay Coffee House in Johannesburg was the place where all these young guys generally met at short notice. Julie worked for a pretty big company and often felt lonely and frustrated in spite of having father and mother. She couldn't get their affection and love. In the very beginning the author refers to the 'traffic jam' on the road and passengers often felt disgusted with the traffic on the road. Julie's car engine had a trouble all of a sudden and Abdu helped her parking her car on the road-side. Women who used to drive car single-handedly often felt embarrassment whenever they found trouble in the vehicle. As she surrendered before the road traffic, Abdu came forward and removed the fault of her car engine in a short time.

Then the artist makes a passing reference to the poor rustics who used to beg on the road-side for their survival (p. 5) Anybody could see prostitutes from Congo and Senegal waiting for their customers. A journalist, a poet, a Buddhist and other white young guys were her usual friends and joined her for coffee and drinks. All these guys where surprised to see this 'garage monkey' Abdu with her in the cafe and felt no interest in him. Mostly Abdu too was passive and dormant and felt no temptation to talk to them. By chance Julie's car was pretty old and out of date and Abdu suggested her to buy a new car in lieu of this old one. But then she planned to buy another second-hand car of good condition and asked him to help her.

In spite of being the daughter of a rich merchant she lived in an ordinary room in The Suburbs, almost in servant's quarters. On Sunday she enjoyed the company of friends in the club in Soweto. Abdu was glad to know that she loved cars as he was a car mechanic from Arab Ibrahim Ibn Musa and lived here illegally as his permit time had expired almost a year ago. Secondly, he didn't reveal his

real name to Immigration office of Johannesburg and remained carefree as if the immigration rules didn't apply to him. The proprietor of the garage felt impressed with his technical skills, paid him less money and gave a sort of store to him to live just behind the garage. Here the washroom was dirty and had no bathing facility. Here the novel is remarkable for social realism.

He told Julie —

'Many things are beautiful' (P, p. 9)

Yes, Julie borrows one of her father's car Rover, a branded car famous for its comforts and latest technology. This car impressed Abdu but she tells him frankly — This is just a gap arrangement. Within a few weeks Abdu manages an old car, to her satisfaction and both of them celebrate loving party in her room intimately. In this novel the artist frequently answers the question — How to live? Following the ethics of Matthew Arnold she does not show indifference to moral issues.

By this time she had become famous as a staunch follower of Nelson Mandela and here too she supports the human rights of blacks and brown people. Like George Orwell, she is opposed to exploitation of man by man. The proprietor of the garage didn't pay properly to Abdu and hence criticized by her. She often failed to understand — How can people be cruel to other fellow beings? Why don't they want to share the profits with their labourers? Why do the friends of Julie not respect the dignity of job of Abdu? What is wrong with this 'grease monkey' if he does manual work? After all somebody has to mend the trouble making engine of the vehicle? If Abdu does it, there is nothing wrong in it. After all work does not degrade any person. His agony is that he fails to live upto the standard of urban rich people of Johannesburg though he is ready to work 24x7.

Abdu struggles regularly in Johannesburg for his existence. He had to give up his studies at an early age due to poverty of the family. Even now he fails to support his parents as it is pretty difficult to make both ends meet here. He knows the importance of higher education in this age of computer science but fails to find any good job to achieve his goal. No scholarship is offered to him. Had he been educated in the university, he would have become an officer by now. But alas! He is told by his lawyer — Try to get out of this country as soon as possible. Don't try to meet the officer of Home Affairs Department to seek help in this case. He had disobeyed the law of South Africa in being silent even after getting warning. There is no escape for him even if he shifts to Cape Town or some other town. The police authorities have their intelligence system and the internet to trace out people like him. No compassion can be considered for him due to his negligence and

disobedience of law He is bound to be arrested if he delays in getting out i.e. 'pick up and go out' at the earliest. City belongs to its citizens and not illegal immigrants. After all fundamentals of law can't be disobeyed by him forever. He is already on the wrong side of legal system. If immigrants like him manage to live here illegally, there will be chaos and anarchy in the country.

Abdu's dreams get shattered and Julie fails to do something solid to support him. All her friends make different suggestions without having correct knowledge of legal system. Since Julie has met her uncle's subordinate lawyer too, she understands the danger to Abdu. Yet she is emotionally attached with her love and fails to detach herself from him on legal basis. Here I find conflict between emotion and law. Lawyer aptly tells both of them — If bribes are offered to escape from law, two irregularities will be found, punishable by law — (a) Why did he evade the first legal warning to pickup and get out of the country? (b) Why did he try to manipulate the situation with corrupt means?

Here the novel is remarkable for economic and intellectual realism as the advocates accept that bribes are commonly accepted in South Africa. But Abdu' case has no solid point to be supported. At the most some procedure can be delayed for a few months. But then every risk is there — may or may not be — is the question. The concerned authority may allow him to explain his situation — Why did he disobey the law of the land? If his answer is not accepted as logical, severe action will be taken definitely against him. All this discussion makes Abdu dull and serious and financially he has no assets to sell to pay even the penalties.

However, Julie loves him from the depth of heart and proves to be a sincere friend — A friend in need is a friend indeed. She discusses the question with her Uncle, a senior lawyer, Mr. Motsamai and then with David and his legal friend. But the net result is the same. Law doesn't care for the sincerity of work of Abdu. Lawyers ignore his dedication to Julie. Actually law is beyond his comprehension and above emotional feelings and love considerations.

Before her departure from Johannesburg she meets her father Nigel to get his blessings for a new life but in vain! He calls her an irresponsible and self-willed girl who has never bothered for her career and his dignity. To him it is disgusting to marry a Muslim who can take divorce anytime he wants. He fails to find any wisdom in her love affairs with a poor fellow like Abdu. May be she repents her decision later on. Here I find the patriarchy system that still flourished in South Africa.

Yet Julie buys two tickets for Abraham Ibn Musa and feels shocked in a deserted country. Here the journey is entirely different — from sophisticated life to deserted country of sand and poverty. Now she recollects the free life of Johannesburg — her evening with friends in El-Ay Coffee House. Abdu is sad at heart because he knew that he was returning home with empty pockets. As he had told her about his poverty, she noticed the same in the lonely village of Abdu. Yet she was welcomed by the family members of his family — his parents, Maryam, Khadija, Uncle and brothers. Abdu's father was a dedicated Muslim and offered Namaz in the mosque just nearby. His mother offered prayers regularly and children of Khadija were taught *The Koran*.

Abdu and Julie contacted several Agents to get work permit and visa from any country of the world. Abdu's Uncle supported him and asked him to work in his garage as and when he liked. Since Abdu enjoyed the rides in Uncle's car, he paid him no wages for repairs. With time Julie starts losing her money as she encashed traveller's cheques. When she requests her mother to send an English translation of *The Koran*, the latter advises her to quit the place as soon as possible.

With the passage of time, Julie joins a village school to teach English to girls. Soon boys also join her lessons and yet she finds herself a stranger even to herself — What the hell she has achieved in her career? Yet Abdu and Julie continue to make love to each other. She adjusts with family routine during the period of Ramdan. After all she accepts herself as pure wife of Abdu. However, she wishes to see everything in this deserted land. During the period of Ramdan she was indirectly suggested not to enjoy sex with Abdu but then they are advanced Muslims and didn't bother for this rigid rule. Now Abdu's mother wishes that she should get a child.

It is disgusting and frustrating to find Abdu broken mentally as Australia fails to allow him to join a job there. Now he tried to get visa for U.S.A. and Canada as these two countries were a bit liberal towards Muslim labourers. Almost a year passes and she never makes fun of anybody as a member of the family. At the same time nobody ever speaks a harsh word to her.

At last Almighty God grants their wish and Abdu gets visa for U.S.A. He decides to work in Chicago and asks her to live for a few months with her mother in California. She wants to accompany him and even packs her suitcase. But at the nick of time she decides not to follow him and stays with Abdu's parents. Now Khadija doubts her husband for his long absence though he sends money for family.

Abdu's mother does not interfere in this affair. Once Julie saw 'Green' fields in her dream. On the proposal of Abdu's father, she accompanies him to see the capital, the market and then the rice mill of Abdulkanim. Here she was entertained by Kanim's son and the latter tells her — If government arranges for (water) tube-well, they can earn more money and also increase the yield of paddy crop. She decides to take the help of her father for this project. But her dreams get shattered when Abdu tells her — That Abdul Kanim smuggles drugs and weapons along with bags of rice. Here the novel is remarkable for social realism.

Since Julie loves her self-dignity, she enjoys morning walk on the sand of the village. A small unknown girl and two goats become intimate with her. Towards the end she decides not to lead a wretched and unsettled life in California as she has no love for her mother. She stays with Abdu's family as she has compromised with her situation and fate. Money consideration does not bother her and she gives six thousand dollars to Abdu to manage for his air ticket and living. Finally, her luggage is left in her ordinary room and Abdu departs for Chicago.

Thus, the novel *The Pickup* is remarkable for changes in the personality of Julie as well as Abdu. Secondly, Abdu realizes his guilt and picks up his clothes from Johannesburg to depart. Thirdly, Julie does not compromise with her father and mother though she identifies herself with family members of Abdu. What she needs is love of family and not pseudo-friendship of El-Ay Coffee House. Fourthly, she rises above caste and colour considerations and marries a Muslim. Fifthly, school work removes her loneliness. Sixthly she always speaks truth with Abdu and his family members. Finally, she has learnt how to live with Strangers.

In the book *Nadine Gordimer : A Study Of Liberalism And Nationalism* Ninganna T. admires artist's faith in liberation and broad-minded nationalism. Of course, Nadine Gordimer was a shrewd observer of men and manners and her canvas is pretty wide in this novel too.

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